



Where History Comes Alive

BATTLESHIP NORTH CAROLINA

Scuttlebutt

November 2009

Thanksgiving 1943 by Paula Curtis-Burn

While you sit in your home eating turkey this Thanksgiving, please spare a moment to give thanks for the brave sailors of BB-55. On the 25th and 26th of November, 1943 the ship was part of a massive Pacific operation to thwart the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN).

The IJN had been very aggressive in the early months of 1943 and were in control of numerous Pacific Islands, among them the Gilberts. The Japanese hold on these islands and atolls threatened sea routes between the United States and Australia. The goal of the operation was to take it back. The plan, carefully devised over many months by Nimitz and others, was to create a wide-spread offensive that would divide and destroy Japanese Naval strength via twin thrusts in the Central and Southwest Pacific. A single line of advance would have left the Allied flank open to attack.

NORTH CAROLINA was part of the 5th fleet under Admiral Raymond Spruance. A huge floating supply convoy was required to keep men and ships at sea. The key target was the Marshall Islands, but the Gilberts and Nauru had to be secured first to provide a springboard for photographic reconnaissance and air attacks.

There were three goals for the operation: 1) occupy and control the Marshalls, 2) improve Allied communication

lines across the Pacific, and 3) open a second "road to Tokyo" through Micronesia.

BB-55 was located 45 miles east of Makin Island. It was their first night battle on this clear, dark night. Sunset was at 1817 without a moon in the night sky. The sea was calm and the wind at 14 knots. At 1900 hours a dozen bogeys started their run in on the starboard side. A nearby destroyer on the starboard beam commenced firing.

ComConPac had issued clear orders that no ship should commence firing until the enemy planes were 4000 yards away and to fire only when concealment was no longer possible. Enemy planes were easier to hear than see at night, and the machine gunners had difficulty seeing the targets due to lack of training for night firing.

The men, exposed on the deck topside had to wear a hood and long sleeved gloves, apply cream to their faces and wear goggles to protect them from flash burns. This gear was in addition to their battle helmets and life jackets. The temperature was unbearable in the humid, Pacific air. Yet the men reported feeling naked as the flares and float lights (designed to pulsate in the water for 1/2 hour to mark the path for the bogey formation) lit the night sky. [Photo above of the night attack.]

There was one definite downed enemy plane shot

down from BB-55's guns on the first night of the battle and a second probable. The next night, the air defense sounded at 1830, and by 1900 the bogeys were dropping flares. Again, it was hard for the machine gunners to see the planes because of the smoke and cork particles from 5" battery firing. And again, BB-55 was credited with one downed enemy plane with a second probable. Some of the bogeys passed less than 200 yards from the masthead. It came under fire from one 40mm and two 20mm guns on the starboard side. After passing astern, the plane broke into flames and crashed in the water.

NORTH CAROLINA and the other fast battleships in the task force escorted the carriers and stayed alert to surface action from the Japanese on Truk, which was only 1200 miles away. The Marines took heavy casualties at Tarawa. But the battle at the Gilberts was payback time for the September 1942 torpedo attack on the NORTH CAROLINA. The I-19 was sunk during the Battle of the Gilberts.

Paula Curtis-Burn has volunteered in the Museum Department since March and is an avid researcher. Material for this article came from the action reports, books, and other resources in the Battleship's collections.

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Thanksgiving Feast, 1910



Men on the Armored Cruiser NORTH CAROLINA were served oyster cocktail, roast turkey with chestnut dressing, boiled ham, loin pork, chicken salad, sweet corn, peas, mashed potatoes, a variety of relishes, plum pudding with brandy sauce, mince pie and ice cream, assorted fruits, coffee, bread, cheese, crackers, mixed nuts, cigars and candy. A full band program accompanied the meal.

How To Bake Beans, Navy Style

Pick over and wash thoroughly 12 pounds of white dried beans and soak in cold water about 6 hours. Do not drain. Add 3-4 gallons of boiling water and simmer 1 hour until beans are tender but not mushy. Drain and save the excess liquid. Add 10 T of salt, 4-1/2 T dry mustard, 1 quart molasses, 4 pounds cubed salt pork, bacon or ham. Place in baking pans and cook in slow (300 degrees) oven 4-5 hours adding liquid as needed.

A chief commissary steward recommended simmering beans 4-1/2 to 5 hours and to add 12 oz. chopped onions, 8 oz. ketchup and place strips of bacon over the beans before baking. Cut the baking time to 1 hour. Recipe serves: 100.

All Hands,
11/46
Galley,
1946-47



Hidden Battleship—Tell your Friends!



Join us on Saturday, November 14th, for a behind-the-scenes tour of unrestored areas of the Battleship. The tour includes the bow, third deck, engine room #1, the reefers, and the fire control tower. The tour is designed for ages 12 and above. The tour will include climbing over knee-high hatches and going up and down narrow ladders, so be prepared.

You choose between a morning or afternoon time slot. (8:30-12:30 or 1:30-5:30PM).

The price includes admission to the Battleship, so you can tour the rest of the ship on your own before or after the program. Price: \$45 regular, \$35 Friends member. Call 910-251-5797 extension 3001 to make and pay for your reservation.

We may be sold out for one of the tours, but you can reserve for our next dates: January 23 or March 1, 2010.

Coming on February 6th: Power Plant Program/Tour. Details next month!



Inside the Fire Control Tower, Level 09, Lookouts.

Scuttlebutt November 2009

Happy Birthday USMC!

November marks the 235th anniversary of the U.S. Marine Corps. Aboard the NORTH CAROLINA, Marines formed the 7th Division in the Gunnery Department. There were approximately 85 Marines. They shared their compartment on the 2nd deck with signalmen and hospital corpsmen.

The Marines were trained in ship to shore duties, so they served as the ship's landing force, a duty they fulfilled just prior to the surrender in August 1945.

Other duties included:

Lookout watches

Manned 5-inch and 20mm guns

Provided guards for the brig

Aided chief master-at-arms

Served as orderlies for the captain and executive officer

Assisted in summary and general courts martial

Provided security for the ship when in port

Richard Fox, USMC, recalled: "The reason the Marines had the 20mm guns (for battle stations) was because we had a lot of practice with the small caliber guns before we went aboard. The Marines had two 5-inch mounts as part of their duties. The Marine captain had the guys down there practicing on the loading machine. Those 5-inch shells weighed about 50+ pounds and they got so good at it that the guns were always ready to fire."

Sailors on BB-55 agreed. "The Marines had two of the 5-inch mounts and they always had more rounds than the sailors. We didn't have a gun crew to match. They were in top physi-

cal shape because they were all pre-war Marines. They had to be around six feet tall for sea duty. They drilled everyday on the loading drill. You'd see them up there everyday, so naturally they got it down to a fine art. We tried to beat them a lot of times, but no way." Michael Horton.

"I think one time Tokyo Rose said that we had a new weapon, a 5-inch machine gun. That is how fast the Marine mount was firing those guns during an air raid." Jackson Belford.

"We were sitting one night at general quarters. A bogey had been reported on the radar. We were standing easy at our guns. All of sudden this Marine jumped up and commenced firing this 20mm gun. The sky lit up with a light out there. A plane hit the water. It was burning. I saw the gasoline burning on the water. I don't know how he knew that this was an enemy plane or how it was there. He must have seen the exhaust." Ollie Goad.

"One of my guys was in the brig during an air attack and was shaking the bars demanding the Marine to let him out. He got on the Marine's nerves so bad that he pulled out his .45 caliber and pointed it at him and said, when I let you out, you'll get out." Paul Wieser.

Sharp Shooting and Sharp Shooters



Twenty Marines who man guns of a tough US battleship line up for a picture. They have shot or assisted in shooting down a score of Japanese. They averaged about one apiece

Sergeant Ferdinand Demmer, ordnance chief of the 20 mm machine gun battery on a battleship, either dislikes longhand or is pretty salty, or both. In either case he's produced something of a record in understatement and is distinctly not qualified for news reporting. In setting down a daily report he wrote:

"Gun No. 3 — Replaced magazine interlock catch.
"Gun No. 46 — Replaced hammer.
"Also had Jap air attack."

The last line is a boiled-down account of a ship-to-air skirmish in which machine gun fire from the battleship is said to have been responsible for defending successfully two aircraft carriers against Japanese planes. One dive bomber was shot down at a range of less than 1000 yards.

Marines who man the gun crews in the battlegroup's

bow are lined up in the picture. Those standing in the back row are, from left to right, Privates First Class Fay B. Fjelstad, Ray E. Troutt, Richard M. Fox, Raymond H. Anderson, George L. Saffron, Reuben H. Atwell, Jr., Peter J. Thara, Francis S. Coffey and Peter P. Boechler.

Middle row, left to right: PFCs Glenn H. Riehl, Eugene F. Gregory and Peter P. Pacek, Gunnery Sergeant Julius F. Angelton, PFC Alex C. Gonzales, Robert L. Gallely and Harry W. Clark.

Front row, left to right: Sergeants Demmer and Robert H. Beck, Corporal Mike Delida and PFC Stargle E. Fuller.

These men have seen action in shooting down or assisting in the destruction of about 20 planes credited to the battleship.

TURN PAGE

USMC Detachment Commanding Officers. They held the rank of Captain and/or Major Harvey Tschirgi, March 1941 to June 1942

Harland Draper, June 1942 to May 1943

Duncan Jewell, June 1943 to May 1944

Joseph Bruder, May 1944 to November 1945 (below, on watch in Sky Control)



The US Marine Corps Historical Company re-created the Gunnery Sergeant's quarters in the Marine compartment, 2nd deck.

What's New?



Volunteer Bill Barnes has been cleaning the 5-inch gun mount on the O1 level, starboard. His polishing has revealed copper tubing and brass plates hidden under layers of paint. He applied much elbow grease as well to clean the voice tube in the mount, as seen left. It's now a thing of beauty!

We then located 28 blueprints in the archives related to the voice tube. Brass tubes were originally located in all the 5-inch gun mounts and their corresponding upper handling rooms; inside various spaces in each gun turret; and in the pilot house, chart house, flag plot, and other bridge locations. Some had small megaphones (left) while others had hinge covered mouth-pieces that were water tight. A voice tube required neither electrical or sound power but was most effective only in short distances.



New window banners have been installed in the Visitor Center, each featuring a ship named NORTH CAROLINA. Friends of the Battleship provided the funding for these magnificent banners.



Business Office: Director: Capt. Terry Bragg, USN (Ret.)
Maintenance Director: Roger Miller; Comptroller: Elizabeth Rollinson
Brooke Laton, Candy Edwards, Kim Mintz

Maintenance: Robert Hall, Terry Kuhn, Steve Lewis, Phil Southworth, Gary Pietak, Jason Boyd

Museum: Kim Sincox, Mary Ames Booker

Programs: Danielle Wallace, Shelly Robinson, Christine Jamet, Julia Yannetti

Promotions: Heather Loftin

Ship's Store: Leesa McFarlane, Cathy Shipman, Devin Buie, Tara Banks, Sabrina Porter, Joy Lynch, Joanna Zazzali

Night Watchmen: Danny Bradshaw, Bill Parr, Brian Gibson

Webmaster: Randy Drew

Battleship NORTH CAROLINA, PO Box 480, Wilmington, NC 28402; 910-251-5797; www.battleshipnc.com



Enlist Today!

Friends of the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA is a non-profit organization whose funds support exhibits, interpretation, educational programs, artifact acquisition, and restoration projects. Projects include:

- Purchase of an 1827 painting of the Ship of the Line NORTH CAROLINA by Nicholas Cammillieri
- Restoration of a rare 26 foot U.S. Navy Motor Whaleboat
- Commission of models of the submarine NORTH CAROLINA and the Confederate ironclad NORTH CAROLINA with custom display cases
- Display mounts and artwork for the SSN-777 exhibit
- Exhibit hall window banners

The Battleship NORTH CAROLINA receives no funding from federal, state or local governments for its operations. The Ship is maintained through revenue generated from admissions, museum store sales, rentals, programming, and Friends memberships.

Membership Levels

Lieutenant (ig), Individual 35.00

Lieutenant, 2 Individuals 45.00

Lt. Commander 75.00

Parents and children under 18 years of age or grandparents and grandchildren under 18 years of age

Commander 150.00

Lt. Commander benefits plus five guest passes

Captain 300.00

Lt. Commander benefits plus 10 guest passes

Commodore 500.00

Recognition signage in the Visitors Center and 25 guest passes

Admiral 1,000.00 (call for details)

Benefits include: Free Admission for One Year; 10% discount in the Ship's Store; Discounts on special programs/tours; Monthly newsletter, *Scuttlebutt*

To Enlist:

Print this form and send with check payable to the Friends of the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA or call 910-251-5797 with your Visa or Mastercard information

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